

Environmental Committee Background Statement

Procedural Reminder: *Delegates are reminded that at the PACMUN Conference, they are **not** expected to arrive with complete resolutions. Delegates are expected to prepare a policy statement that can be read in one minute and three solid operative clauses with which to caucus and kick-off debates. Resolutions are expected to emerge from the debates in the committees.*

**TOPIC AIR POLLUTION: INDUSTRIAL AND VEHICLE EMISSIONS IN
LATIN AMERICA**
CHAIR GARRETT YU

Air pollution creates high costs for society. Each year, air pollution causes an estimated 1 million premature deaths worldwide. Recent Bank studies in Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, and El Salvador estimated that the cost of outdoor air pollution is equivalent to approximately 1 percent of national GDP. It is estimated that the cost of air pollution is 3.8 billion dollars. Millions of dollars have been spent to reduce emissions. The Pan American Health Organization concluded that more than 100 million people in Latin American cities are exposed to levels of air pollution that exceed the recommended standards. Moreover, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Burden of Disease Report, the impact of outdoor air pollution in Latin America causes 35,000 annual premature deaths.



“In general, it has found a weak foundation for air quality management. It has identified cities with potential vulnerability to air pollution. These cities may require special attention as part of our growing sustainable development portfolio. Therefore, these findings will help the UN reinforce its commitment to achieve the millennium goals and attain a better quality of life in Latin America (World Bank 2011).”

The air pollution in Latin America is linked to high health risks, inadequate land-use, poor fuel quality, and weak air quality management capacity. Those most vulnerable to the effect of pollution are the elderly, the poor, the children, and the sickly.

In Mexico City, Santiago, Lima, São Paulo, and Bogotá, and more recently in medium-sized cities of Brazil and Colombia, governmental policies are targeting air pollution as one of the main environmental hazards in the region.

“...Chile is exposed to high levels of air pollution during a significant portion of the year, especially the five million inhabitants of Santiago. Santiago ranks as one of the most polluted cities in the world and frequently confronts air-quality alerts and pollution emergencies. Air pollution in Santiago results in damaging respiratory diseases and a large number of premature deaths. Located in central Chile, the city sits in the middle of a valley and is surrounded by two mountain ranges: the Andes Mountains and the Cordillera de la Costa. Because of Santiago's unique geographic location and weather patterns, ventilation and dispersion of air pollutants within the valley are restricted; thus explaining why

Santiago, with emission levels similar to those in other cities, suffers from such high atmospheric pollution levels (US Energy Information Agency).”

CRISIS



The situation is critical: health issues and deaths are on the rise. More and more factories have been set up and vehicle emissions have dramatically increased. In manufacturing centers mechanical and chemical explosions release many toxic gasses such as a large amounts of carbon dioxide, ammonia, sulfur dioxide, and mercury vapor. If the situation is not addressed and

air quality does not improve in the next 40 years, the land might be uninhabitable forever. We need to find a solution to restore the air quality.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What are the effects of air pollution in Latin America?
- What kinds of chemicals are in the air?
- What steps can the Environmental Committee take to reduce the amount of chemical emissions?
- How can the UN promote the restoration of air quality in Latin America?
- Is there a way to reduce the negative effects of factories without destroying the Latin American economy?
- What environmental committees/organizations/programs have been helpful in this situation?
- What can your county do to support the improvement of air quality in Latin America?

HELPFUL LINKS:

UN Environment Program

www.unep.org/

The World Bank:

<http://go.worldbank.org/QJOVI9BI80>

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/countrytemplate_ci.html

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ci.html>

NCBI –Article on urban air pollution in Latin America and the Caribbean: health perspectives.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2238696>

<http://corrosion-doctors.org/AtmCorros/mapCA.htm>

The Economist – Article

<http://www.economist.com/node/1021580>

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TOPIC DEFORESTATION AND ITS PREVENTION IN GUATEMALA
CHAIR SAM KUSTER

Guatemala was formed in 1840 and has been a pioneer of environmental case studies ever since. It has a great amount of national and environmental parks, second only to Brazil. However, since 1990 Guatemala has lost 17% of its forests. Total amount of forest cover has fallen from around 5 million hectares to 3 and a half million hectares. The deforestation rate has risen by 13% since 1990 and it continues to increase.

Having one of the most extensive and diverse rainforests in the world, Guatemala is a destination for thousands of scientists and tourists who travel annually both for the research of new scientific discoveries and to spend some quality vacation time. It is a known fact that the country is home to 1,246 species of amphibians, as well as over 8,000 species of plants. Despite the scientific interest this biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate annually of over 90,000 hectares.

Illegal activities have also increased. Logging, or cutting down trees without official permission, has been on the rise in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve and the Laguna del Tigre national park. The destruction of natural habitats began when Spanish and Portuguese Conquistadores reached Latin America, and felled large rainforests to allow room for their colonial pursuits. The governments' needs to fuel their own economies continued these damaging activities. Nowadays, forms of business such as gold mining, cattle pasture and road construction continue the demise of the rainforests.



Deforestation has deadly consequences. In 2005, mudslides due to the loss of trees killed over 1,500 people in rural areas outside of big cities such as Guatemala City. Poverty, in Guatemala, compounds the problem of deforestation with many natives being forced to make do with what they've got, living off the land and making a quick dollar wherever, whenever. Due to the extremity of these living conditions, working as a lumberjack offers a quick, cheap job for minimal pay. If the chopping down of the Guatemalan rainforests is to be stopped, then the people who are chopping down the trees have to be considered as well.

CRISIS STATEMENT

Earlier this year, on February 20th, armed individuals were seen unloading munitions and heavy artillery in the Petén area of Guatemala. Guatemala has expressed its concerns, and is unable to identify the dangerous insurgents in the northern half of its country. Due to the recent turn of events, Mexico has threatened to occupy the territory of Petén unless Guatemala can deal with the armed individuals, who have been identified as the Flor del Tigre terrorist group. More worryingly, Belize has threatened war unless Guatemala can deal with the situation. Flor del Tigre has taken refuge in a small forest enclave, which was cleared for the construction of a road that was never built. Many of these “enclaves” can be found all over the Guatemalan rainforest, and are seen as potential threats to national and international communities, as they are perfect hideouts for groups with troublesome intentions, such as Flor del Tigre. Your role as a delegate is to balance the political tensions between three nations on the verge of conflict, while simultaneously dealing with deforestation in Guatemala and the ecological and militaristic threats it poses.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Should military intervention be used to address the terrorist presence in the Guatemalan rain forest?
- Should sanctions be considered to curb deforestation and its consequence in the region?
- How can Guatemala continue to profit from the rainforest without putting its civilians and environment at risk?
- How do environmental issues impact terrorism?
- How can the UN encourage countries such as Guatemala to enact environmental measures that safeguard its biosphere?

HELPFUL LINKS:

UN Environment Program

<http://www.unep.org/>

Background Info on deforestation:

<http://rainforests.mongabay.com/20guatemala.htm>

Terrorism and rainforest (articles):

<http://www.metro.co.uk/news/407324-uk-cocaine-users-destroying-rainforest-and-funding-terror>

http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/TerrOrgCrime_TBA.pdf

Rainforest Statistics:

<http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/2000/Guatemala.htm>

Guatemala Info:

<http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Guatemala.html#b>

CIA Background on Guatemala:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gt.html>